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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Cartoons on Prophet Mohamed,
Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Iraq, State of Union Address
(2/3-6)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers reported that on Saturday angry mobs protesting cartoons depicting the prophet Mohamed as a terrorist stormed the buildings housing the Danish and Norwegian Embassies in Damascus. Protestors set fire to both missions and pillaged the contents of the first-floor office of the Chilean Embassy located in the building housing the Danish Embassy. Papers reported that the Syrian mufti and the Awqaf minister expressed regret over the incidents.

Syrian papers also published a statement by the Syrian Foreign Ministry in which the Ministry expressed its regret over the acts of violence that accompanied the protests and damaged the embassies in Damascus. In the statement the Ministry said, "We understand the popular anger over the offences against the Prophet but it is unacceptable for law and order to be violated in the country."

The ministry's statement echoed comments by the country's top religious leader, Grand Mufti Sheikh Ahmed Badreddine Hassun. "It is regrettable that certain people have poorly expressed their protest against the European newspapers' publication of images that are offensive to the Prophet," he said. Sheikh Hassun, whose comments were carried by state media, suggested "elements who do not believe in dialogue were introduced among the demonstrators" in Damascus. "We are sad about their actions that harm our dialogue with the Danish and Norwegian people," Sheikh Hassun said. Syrian papers also reported that anti-terrorism units clashed with an armed "takfiri terrorist group" in the town of Kafr Batna outside Damascus. Takfiris are extremist Islamic militants who label other Muslims as apostates, issuing religious fatwas, or edicts, to kill others. A SANA release said the group was planning to carry out terrorist attacks in Damascus and its suburbs. The release added that the leader and two of his aides were killed during an exchange of fire lasting 30 minutes.

End summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"Syria expresses regret over the violent acts during the protests which caused material damages at some embassies. No threats

against foreign citizens. The anger continues. Lebanese Interior Minister Hasan Sabeh resigns following Beirut protest demonstration" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/6)

"Syria's anti-terrorism forces kill chief of a takfiri group, arrest two of his assistants and confiscate weapons and instruments of provocation." (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/6)

"The Mufti of the Republic: We hope for dialogue, and regret this mode of protest" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/5)

"Despite tight security measures, demonstrators storm the embassies of Denmark and Norway in Damascus to protest insults to the Prophet Mohamed" Government-owned Tishreen, 2/5)

"Denmark officially apologizes to Syria for cartoons on Prophet Mohamed. French Ambassador in Damascus notes that publication of cartoons of the Prophet are contrary to French values" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/3)

"The issue of cartoons on Prophet Mohamed escalates. Western newspapers went to an extreme. Indications show that the crisis will reach a dangerous state. Demonstrations sweep the Islamic world calling for boycott of European products" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/4)

"The French Ambassador in Damascus Jean-Francois Girault: Insulting religions is a foolish and disallowed act" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/4)

"The People's Assembly calls on world parliaments to confront biased campaigns against Islam" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/3)

"President Asad discusses with Arab-French Nida Society the role of intellectuals and journalists in boosting dialogue. President Asad: Syria's role is pivotal to realize peace and stability" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/3)

"The killing the Lebanese youth in the Shebaa Farms escalates. Hizbollah retaliates. Lebanese FM Salloukh: The international community is called upon to move and stop the Israeli aggressions. Lebanese personalities: Lebanese resistance confronts aggression" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/4)

"Subsequent to a meeting with a delegation from the Council for the National Interest: We refuse to place Hizbollah on the terrorism list" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/6)

"FM Farouk Shara confirms continued Arab support for Palestinians. Khaled Mashaal, Chief of Hamas Political Bureau: We work to form a national coalition government" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/6)

"Hamas confirms its right to self-defense. Two Palestinian martyred in a new Israeli aggression against Gaza" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/6)

"Hamas is expected to form the cabinet soon. Washington to starve the Palestinian people" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/4)

"The Iraqi unified coalition chooses its candidate for Prime Ministry today" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/6)

"One US soldier killed near Baghdad. The final results of the Iraqi elections will be announced soon. Additional \$120 billion to cover war costs. A news conference by Rumsfeld transforms into a hearing on Iraq. (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/4)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Even Apology Is Insufficient"

Ahmad Dawwa, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (2/5): "The Danish government and some other European governments, whose newspapers reprinted the cartoons about the Prophet Muhammad, are responsible for the escalating protests in the Islamic world and for any reactions that attacks on religious sanctities might draw in the future...."

"The Danish Prime Minister's failure to offer an apology at the beginning led to the escalation of anger in the Islamic world...."

"The Arab and Islamic countries must apply pressure to drive European countries to take legal measures against those who use the freedom of speech to offend other societies and faiths...."

"Claims on Democracy"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (2/5): "The Arab citizens feel and see clearly that they are directly targeted by Israel and America, and they are convinced that what is being promoted as reform and Western democracy raises scores of questions regarding the causes, motives and consequences, especially in the light of reports that show that there is a lot of wealth expended in this effort to promote these ideas...."

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"This belief is enforced by the fact that the Arabs who are impassioned by Western democracy have kept silent about the deliberate insults to Muhammad, and indeed some have used these attacks as an occasion to defend what they call the freedom of opinion and expression..."

"Israelis, Americans and some Europeans speak publicly of what they call Islamic terrorism, but plunge into wars to insult Islam and the Muslims, imposing sanctions on them, keeping them from knowledge and technology; and then it is they who speak of what they call political realism, opening up to others and receiving their opinions...."

"Reasons of Israeli Anger"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (2/4): "Lebanese PM Al-Saniora's statement, saying that Hizbollah is a resistance movement, might have disturbed Israel and its allies and masters so it decided to commit the crime of assassinating the 17-year old Lebanese shepherd in the Shebaa Farms. This crime is like a message to the Lebanese saying Israel is angry and dissatisfied with Al-Saniora's statement and the subsequent step that was taken; namely the return of the ministers from Hizbollah and Amal Movement to the [Lebanese] government...."

"Israel is angry because when the Lebanese and their government say that the resistance is not a militia, they foil all Israeli and American attempts to end the resistance based on Resolution 1559...."

"Through the killing of the Lebanese boy, Israel told the Lebanese that it will not leave Lebanon alone or allow accord and reconciliation in Lebanon, and that its aggression will continue in various forms...."

"Will this drive some Lebanese to change their calculations and not exclude Israel from what happened, is happening, and will happen?"

"State of the Failure Address"

Samir al-Shibani, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (2/4): "In his State of the Union Address, President Bush was unable to hide the signs of weakness and defeat.... Observers are fully convinced that Bush's war on Iraq has failed...."

"The US President showed unlimited bias towards Israel.... This perpetuates tension and conflict in the region. It is necessary for the peoples of the region, therefore, to stand fast and entrench the concept of resistance as a method and behavior because it is the only way to force Israelis and their supporters to comply with the "ABCs" of peace. Any other wager will lose. Indeed, it might heighten the aggressiveness of the Israeli and American practices against the world".

"Who Provokes Hatred?"

Ahmad Hamadah, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (2/3): "While Arabs and Muslims call for dialogue and understanding among nations and civilizations, many Western

countries close doors to dialogue with them, and their media, supported by the Zionist lobby and Israel, launch campaigns entailing lies and fabrications to harm Arab and Muslim standing, distort their civilized image before the world public, and describe them as terrorists, killers, and criminals....

"Cartoons about the Prophet Muhammad are part of the erroneous understanding of the Arab and Muslim culture and civilization, especially after the 9/11 attacks.... Such campaigns provoke hatred among nations instead of promoting the values of tolerance.... Arab and Islamic organizations must make further efforts to advance the culture of tolerance and to explain to misled people that Islam condemns attacks on any person regardless of his race and religion...."

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